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SUBJECT: AUGUSTIN KATUMBA, PRESIDENT'S ALLEGED TREASURER
AND ENFORCER, STEPS DOWN AS HEAD OF NATIONAL ASSEMBLY'S
RULING COALITION; HIS INFLUENCE COULD REMAIN

Classified By: Ambassador William J. Garvelink for reasons 1.4 (b) and
(d).

¶1. (C) Summary: National Assembly Deputy Augustin Katumba Mwanke resigned as Executive Secretary of the ruling coalition, the "Alliance pour la Majorite Presidentielle" (Alliance for the Presidential Majority -- AMP) last week. He relinquished the position amid pervasive rumors of an impending shake up since a recent tumultuous party conference. His departure -- apparently on good terms with President Kabila -- fueled speculation regarding Katumba's political future. However, persistent and credible health concerns may -- or may not -- prevent him from playing any further substantive role for Kabila. End summary.

¶2. (C) Katumba's departure from the AMP leadership post came as no surprise. Although he tendered his resignation approximately seven months ago, coalition Deputy Executive Secretary Louis Koyagialo confirmed the resignation took effect only last week. Koyagialo declined to name a successor, who would be appointed by Kabila, but said Katumba would remain in the "political family" in another role as yet to be identified. Local press opined Katumba might serve as head of the president's People's Party for Reconstruction and Democracy PPRD) or as the next Prime Minister. Known for his business acumen, political discretion and efficiency, as well as his close relationship with Kabila, Katumba has made no secret of his desire to leave the DRC to become ambassador to Israel, Switzerland, or South Africa.

¶3. (C) Discussion of Katumba stepping down intensified after reports of a tense coalition meeting in late October/early November. Katumba, who doled out ministerial appointments during the cabinet reshuffle in 2008, has been under pressure from domestic politicians posturing for a job when Kabila again reshuffles his cabinet, possibly by the end of the year. The new cabinet is expected to be the last before the local and national elections projected for 2011. In addition to stress resulting from his close relationship to Kabila, Katumba is also believed to have significant health problems. He spent several weeks in South Africa earlier this year for medical treatment. The nature of his health problems is not known. Some observers, however, believe he is HIV positive. This theory would seem bolstered by his emaciated physical appearance.

¶4. (C) Comment: Katumba, a Katangan who rarely meets with diplomats, is viewed by many as a kind of shady, even nefarious figure within Kabila's inner circle. A former financier who lived many years in South Africa before returning to the DRC after Mobutu's departure, he is believed to manage much of Kabila's personal fortune. He is known to be close to Israeli citizen Dan Gertler, a mysterious trader in precious minerals who, according to some

sources, lends Kabila his private jet for trips abroad. Gertler has invited Katumba to Israel often. Although Katumba would like to go to South Africa, we understand that the GRSA would likely not give him agreement because of suspected illegal banking transactions years ago. While the removal of Augustin Katumba as head of the AMP is a significant change in the leadership hierarchy, his demotion may not signal permanent exclusion from Kabila's inner circle, nor does it follow that he will exercise less influence vis-a-vis his boss. Kabila, as Congolese leaders past, routinely rotates his followers in and out of positions and closer or farther from the center of power. This juggling may keep potential rivals from consolidating their authority by maintaining the established patron-client relationship. With Kabila's focus turning more toward his reelection campaign, more changes are sure to follow. End comment.

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